

# A DREADFUL WASTE OF HUMAN ENERGY

Some of the Things  
Done by Hand  
in Japan.

YOKOHAMA.—One of the first things to attract the attention of the foreigner in Japan is the dreadful waste of human energy. On every hand he sees the greatest expenditure of labor for the least return. This labor is as poorly paid as it is unproductive in results. The earning capacity of the masses of any country is what regulates its purchasing power, and gives it commercial rank among the nations. In the outset it may be well to state, by way of comparison, that the annual exports of the United States, when divided between the population, amounts to about twenty dollars for each man, woman and child; while the purchases of Japan, applied to its population in the same way, is a trifle less than three dollars per capita. This would seem to indicate that the earning capacity of one American is equal to that of seven Japanese. After following my investigation on this subject the reader may form his own conclusions.

Across the street from where I am living a new house is in course of construction. The excavation was accomplished by laborers who received fifteen cents a day—ten hours. They carried the dirt to the street in baskets, then dumped it into carts, which another crowd of men pulled away with much noise and labor. This process was so slow that the work proved expensive in the end. Before that excavation was completed the dirt taken from it was almost worth its weight in gold as compared to what it would have cost in an American city.

## THE ORIENTAL CARPENTER.

The various kinds of workmen on the new structure arrive before seven o'clock, but they do not go to work promptly. They build a little fire and gather around it to talk and thaw out. By eight o'clock the most of them are at work. They all wear blue cotton suits with characters upon them to indicate their guild, as well as the firm or individual for whom they are working. This is their winter garb—in summer they wear nothing but a cloth around their loins, and a band about their foreheads to keep the sweat from running down their faces.

The carpenter's wages range from thirty to forty-five cents per day (all quotations in this article are in American money), according to their grade. They use the crudest kind of tools, not even having the claw hammer which our workmen consider so indispensable. I saw one of them starting an American wire nail in a board. He put it in the wrong place but did not discover his mistake until he had taken one whack at it with his awkward hammer. The nail was half way in and he had no means of getting it out. He stood regarding it with a puzzled look on his face, and I felt like suggesting that he pull it out with his teeth. It was finally removed with laborious effort by using a pair of tongs. All the workmen waste much time in the contemplation of unimportant detail. They constantly misapply their strength, loiter to talk and smoke, and when two or more are working together at any task they insist on chanting a droning song at every stroke. It requires little investigation to conclude that this labor is cheap mainly because its productive power is so small.

## HOUSES MUST FIT MATS.

One peculiarity of a Japanese house is the fact that its dimensions are governed by the size of the mats which are to go upon the floors when it is completed. These mats are always made in multiples of three and the floors are constructed to correspond with them. Japanese lumber is made to conform to this arrangement, and there is no waste to it at all. The native carpenters are completely baffled when they get hold of American lumber with its odd sizes, especially if they are required to construct something with dimensions other than multiples of three.

My neighbor is having the grass cut from his lawn. Four men are crawling around on their knees using shears. He pays a small sum for the labor of each individual, but they have already been on the job three days, and in the end it will prove expensive. At the wharf I noticed the manner of driving piling. A dozen brawny fellows were tugging away at the job, making the hardest kind of work of it. A crude pulley arrangement was suspended on poles, and a rope extended from the "driver" to each man. As they began to lift they all joined in a song. At a given point in the chant all hands let go and the weight dropped onto the pile. This was repeated until the job was finished. It looked like the contractor was getting a lot of crude muscle for his money but little labor. To be a laboring man in Japan a fellow has to know a lot of tunes. He also has to be well posted in his cues or he is liable to let go at the wrong time and mix things up generally.

## THE COST OF LIVING.

Doubtless you would like to know how these people live, earning as they do only a few cents a day. The average family among the laboring classes will probably consist of five persons. In most cases both the man and the woman work and their combined income will not exceed six or eight dollars per month. First they rent a house, twelve by fifteen feet square, for seventy-five cents or a dollar per month, according to location. Their food consists of rice, fish and vegetables—if they are very poor they cannot afford rice. Fish and vegetables are exceedingly cheap. The furnishings of their house are so scant that the family never hires a day when moving day comes—they can easily carry everything on their backs. This is illustrated whenever there is an alarm of fire. The fragile, inflammable houses are easily consumed, and the first indication of danger from this source will cause the immediate exodus of a whole community, household effects and all.



JAPANESE CARPENTERS AT WORK.

The expense for dress is insignificant. The cost of a man's winter outfit will not exceed a dollar and a half. In summer he goes naked. The woman can purchase a kimono at almost any price. Foreigners wonder why the natives do not discard their wooden clogs and wear shoes. If these wondering strangers will furnish something equally as serviceable as the native sandals, for a nickel a pair, they will doubtless be able to secure some customers. The Jap is always in for anything new if he has the price, but he can never be much of a customer for anybody until he can be trained to utilize his force to produce greater wealth.

**ALL LABOR IS CHEAP.**  
The low scale of wages is not confined to common workmen. The highest priced laborers in Japan are the stone-masons and shoe-makers, the best of whom receive a dollar a day. The scale for printers and leather workers is fifty cents a day, while a painter will command sixty cents. The foreman of the electric light plant in Yokohama—remember that this is a city of 350,000 inhabitants—receives only forty-five cents a day for his skillful services. He is an educated electrician but his salary is lower than that of the ordinary American office boy. The scale of wages is higher in Yokohama than in other parts of the Empire because the foreign firms here will pay more for competent help than the native concerns. If there is a bright young man in the post office, or some other department of the government service, it is not long until some foreigner gets him by offering an advance.

The government has thus been gradually forced to raise its scale in order to keep the most desirable employees in its service. The policemen are furnished with uniforms and paid thirty cents a day. The clothes they wear on duty are the best they have ever worn, or will ever wear if they quit their jobs. Book-keepers and accountants for private native firms are paid about thirty cents a day, with room rent, board and sometimes with even tobacco thrown in. Seeing that the employers are so generous in providing perquisites, I suppose the boys are willing to furnish their own matches. The average pay of the 3,500 clerks in the employ of the government in various parts of Japan is fifty cents a day. This is quite a contrast to the fat jobs our politicians hand around among their friends.

## RAILROAD SERVICE IS POOR.

The railroad employees are as poorly paid as those of the government and private concerns. The station-master in Yokohama, who has several hundred people under him, receives but thirty dollars a month. Of course he has a family and has to pay rent and employ a staff of servants out of this small salary. The engineers, conductors, trainmen, station employees and others who are under him, average about fifteen dollars per month. As may be surmised the railway service is nothing to brag about. It is eighteen miles from Yokohama to Tokyo and it takes an hour to make the trip—longer than it requires to go from Washington to Baltimore, a distance of forty miles. The tariff is three cents a mile and the accommodations are not nearly so good as on our street cars.

The wages for skilled labor in manufactures does not vary from the general cheapness prevailing in other branches of industry. A china decorator is paid but thirty cents for ten hours work. During this time he sits on his legs in tailor fashion and draws the most delicate designs. He is an artist and can execute his own patterns, yet one of our street urchins with a nimble pair of legs and good lung power can earn more in an hour selling papers. In a brewery I saw a score of girls pasting labels on bottles. They performed their task with amazing dexterity and dispatch, but their pay was only seven cents for ten hours—not enough to keep one of our factory girls in chewing gum. There are thousands of girls in Japan working for three or four cents a day.

## MERCHANTS HAVE SMALL STOCKS.

The men who rely upon individual effort to make a living, such as merchants, peddlers and vendors, have to get along on a scant margin of profit. The average store is about twelve feet square. The proprietor has such a limited stock that his customer can point to any article in the place. As a rule the merchant's family live in the rear, and the store is utilized as a sleeping room when the blinds are put up at night. Show cases and counters are used in some places, but as a general thing the customer sits on a small elevation in the front part of the shop and boys bring the goods forward for exhibition while the proprietor extols their merits. Many dealers cannot afford to pay even the smallest rent, and

move about the streets with their stocks on their backs. The fish market halts regularly at the kitchen door and the green goods grocer knows no such item of expense as rent and clerk hire. Dealers in lamps, flowers, baskets, brooms, porcelain dishes, etc., go about looking for trade rather than wait for customers to come to them.

Doubtless the most persistent canvasser for business is the tailor—generally a Chinaman. These tradesmen are thicker than mosquitoes. They are after the tourist at the hotel before he has his trunk unpacked. They always have their samples with them and will deliver garments almost before the American tailor would have the cloth cut. A guest in the hotel where I am stopping received an invitation to attend an afternoon party and his card stated that gentlemen would be expected to wear frock suits and high hats. He did not have such a suit and had less than twenty-four hours in which to get one, but a tailor took his order, gave him one "try-on" and had the clothes ready for him several hours before it was time to dress for the function. Nor was it a shoddy job. The same thing would have cost \$125.00 in New York, but the charge here was only seventy yen—about thirty-five dollars in American money. When asked how it was possible for him to turn out work so rapidly, the foreman smiled and said tailors were cheap and plentiful. The coat took the most time so he put five men to work on it. They sat on the floor in a circle with the garment between them. One worked on each sleeve, one on each tail and one, on the collar and body. The tailors union here has no rule about over-time and the fact that they had to work all night was not taken into account at all.

**WHY THE JAPS ARE POOR.**  
The explanation of Japan's low wage scale, as well as the poor standard of its labor, lies in the temperament of its people. They still reflect the effect of centuries of serfdom. Ambition is the motive power that moves a man to accomplishment and the average Jap of the lower classes can hardly hope to better the condition in which he was born. His life means a mere struggle for existence. The customs of the country are such that it is difficult for a man to save any of his income no matter how much it may be. Heads of families retire early and throw the burden of support on their elder sons, who in turn soon shift the responsibility if they can. It is an unwritten law that a man of means must support his poor kin, and when a young man begins to succeed the majority of his relatives make it a point to get poor in order to secure part of his salary.

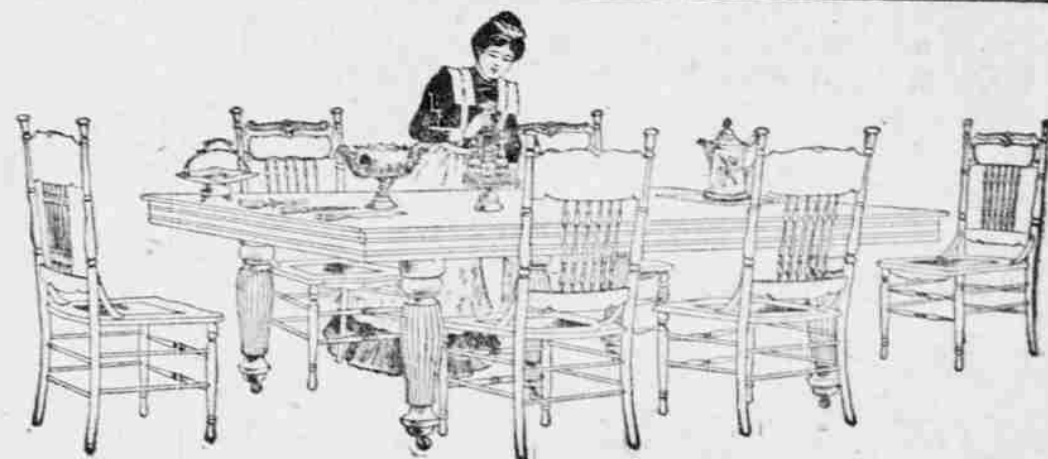
An example of this was afforded recently at the American Consulate in Yokohama. A bright young Jap who had been educated in the United States was earning a hundred dollars per month as an assistant to Consul-General Bellows. Such a salary in Japan is something enormous. It is actually more than is paid to the governor of the province, yet this young fellow couldn't save a cent. As fast as his wages increased his poor relations multiplied. It really is enough to take the ginger out of a fellow when he stops to realize that no matter how much he earns, that he will not be permitted to profit by it. He might just as well be a coolie singing at his work to get his end of the fact that he is holding down a horse's job. The indifference of the lower Jap to his pinched condition, and the complacency with which he accepts his poor portion, is the reason why his fortunes remain at such a low ebb. When the fire of personal ambition begins to burn within him, to keep pace with the military zeal he is manifesting, then will the darkness of his lot begin to be illumined by fairer prospects.

FREDERIC J. HASKIN.

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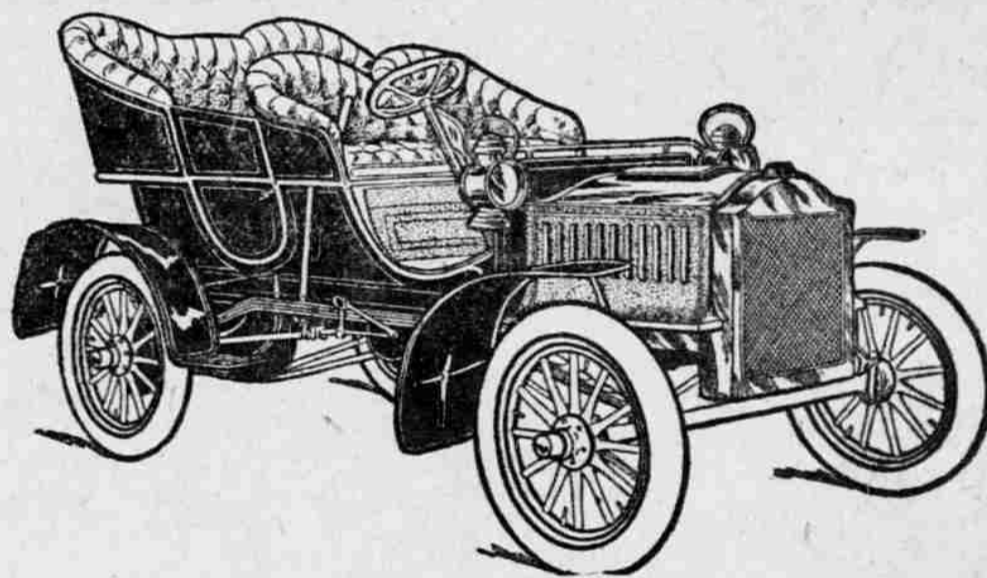
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